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Forest Service NEWS



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

RECOMMENDATIONS MADE FOR RESTORING FOREST HEALTH IN BLUE MOUNTAINS

LA GRANDE, July 23--Tim Rogan, Special Assistant to Regional Forester John Lowe, today announced the results of a special panel convened to recommend priorities and long-term objectives for restoring forest health in the Blue Mountains.

Lowe convened the panel in May as a followup to the Blue Mountains Forest Health Report, that identified strategies on which to base future management actions to restore ecosystems in the Blue Mountains.

The panel found that five of 19 river basins are "far outside" a natural sustainable range of ecosystem health and are in urgent need of restoration.

To conduct its assessment, the panel of Forest Service resource specialists used an ecosystem approach, recognizing that ecosystems are made up of elements and processes, and that each of them functions within a range of natural variability (rainfall varies from year to year, wildlife populations fluctuate, etc.).

The panel's work will be used as a foundation for a multi-year, long-term restoration program for the Blue Mountains. Lowe directed that restoration teams be established and assigned to the three Blue Mountain National Forests (Umatilla, Malheur, and Wallowa-Whitman). Their restoration and recovery efforts will consist of acceleration of restoration work by supplementing efforts already underway by the three national forests.

Working with people in the community who have a special interest or stake in the health of the Blue Mountains, the panel mapped three broad categories of ecosystem health in the Blue Mountains, and identified seven long-term objectives for restoring forest health by restoring ecosystems in the Blue Mountains:

- . reduce the risk of catastrophic fire;
- . bring all surface waters to conditions in accord with State water quality standards;
- . provide high quality riparian vegetation;
- . emphasize restoration and enhancement of aquatic habitat, especially for fish listed as threatened or endangered species;
- . reduce the risk of epidemic insect outbreaks;
- . provide cover habitat for big game species within the scope of restoration activities; and
- . identify and address community needs in designing ecosystem restoration.

"Restoration activities such as reforestation, thinning, fuel treatment, aerial spraying, and salvage on tens of thousands of acres in the Blue Mountains have already been done," said Rogan. "But there is much more to be done, as we work together, to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires, to recover the value of dead timber, to develop employment opportunities for people in the communities of the Blue Mountains, and to bring these ecosystems back into a healthy range," he added.

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